

EAGLE



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July 2012 #6

Hello fellow CVSOs,

Another month, and 1000 new stories. What I would like to touch upon this month is the new initiative by the VA to combat homeless veterans. Specifically, the large grant funds recently released around Indiana.

Unfortunately, in my opinion, they released those funds to civilian organizations and added a loophole that the funds can be used to fund anti-homeless programs for anyone, veteran or not. I am not sure about the other CVSOs who's counties were in receipt of these funds, but my door has been swinging all week, and the phone jumping off the hook, mostly with what I call the predators. Individuals, Vets and non-Vets who search out these types of programs, and work themselves into the grant money. I had 4 contacts today come in to ask about the program, 2 vets and 2 non-vets. None of the 4 are actually homeless, but were looking into how they could get the funding to set up new residences. One of the Vets was planning ahead, saying that he was planning on moving out of his current residence in November, and wanted to know the rules, so he could qualify for the program in November. One of the civilians had a similar story. I highly recommend that if your county received any of this grant money that you work with CANI, (Community Action Northern Indiana) or the controlling organizations to weed out those predators so the funding can be used for those truly in need.

Looking forward to seeing you all at the fall conference!

Brian

He Deployed, Kids Aren't in DEERS

[Ms. Vicki](#)

Dear Ms. Vicki,

I am a mother of two. Their father is in the Reserve full time and has been deployed recently.

Unfortunately, he did not complete all the paperwork needed for our children to receive their IDs. He also did not do what was needed for their TRICARE enrollment to be moved from his state to mine since I have custody of the children.

What can I do to expedite this? Also what do our children rate when it comes to military privileges on their ID card/ i.e. exchange, commissary and recreation.

Thanks!

Confused and helpless

Dear Confused,

I regret that you were left with a feeling of helplessness. However, you can be given a power of attorney to have the children's ID cards issued or their father can complete the necessary form to have the children added.

The information will be added in DEERS and all you would have to do is go to a location/base and have the ID cards made.

The ID cards will give the children access to military bases, commissaries and PX. They could also participate in on post youth sports and other activities. You should contact DEERS. It stands for Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System at 1-800-538-9552. DEERS is the ID card section. I hope this helps.

Dear Ms. Vicki,

My husband and I are halfway through our first deployment. It's approximately an eight-month cruise.

My husband is very unhappy with his job. I think we still love each other, but all of the sudden I don't feel like I want him to come home. I think I am just dreading having such a negative influence in the house with me because I am very sensitive to the feelings of others around me.

I generally derive a lot of happiness by making the people around me happy but with him it feels like nothing can make him happy. I am very anxious and it's still another four months away. Can you give me any advice on how to cope?

I know I need to accept him and not expect him to feel a certain way, but I am dreading having to deal with that every day and unsure about the future.

I am fairly independent and try to keep a positive outlook despite whatever circumstances occur. I just don't know who to talk to about this. I live and work on base and feel like talking to someone affiliated with the base or another spouse is just a little too close to home. My family cares, but they can't really understand.

Sincerely,

Anxiously Waiting

Dear Anxious,

I totally understand. During deployments, we can get into our own rhythms, adjust to our own schedules and establish new roles, etc.

In many ways, we become more independent and learn to listen to ourselves more. When your husband complains, you feel helpless and don't know what to do or what to say. As a result, it brings you down in the dumps. Yes, you will be glad when he is home from deployment, but you won't be ready for any negativity. I think you should let your husband know how you feel. Tell him you want to be there to support him but when he complains you don't know what to do.

He has to realize it's his career and he must become assertive and empowered enough to change the situation as much as he can because there is nothing you will be able to do about his job or working conditions. It's not your role to change his work environment.

However, you can be supportive and be a part of his cheering crowd. Ask your husband to get a sheet of paper and on one side make a list of things he would like to see change. On the other side, he should list what he can do to change each situation. Most importantly, beside each he should give the date or time for him to start 2

changing the situation. This will let you know if he is serious and motivated about change or simply moping around about his problems.

On the other hand, he could be tired of the deployment and ready to come home. As a result, everything and everyone is getting on his last nerve. This is normal too.

I'm glad that you have a positive outlook on your situation. Continue to take care of yourself. Thank you for reading the column and for taking the time to write to me.

Ms. Vicki

About Contributor

Ms. Vicki is a native of Dallas. She is married to an active-duty Soldier and they have three sons. Vicki has always had a gift for giving quick advice and steering people in the right direction. Her passion has always been helping anyone who is in need of advice and writing. Ms. Vicki has a Master's of Science in Social Work from the University of Louisville. She is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and currently works as a therapist with military servicemembers and their families. She provides services for a wide array of concerns such as combat stress, PTSD, couples and marital problems, depression, grief and loss, stress and coping, etc.

Ms. Vicki also writes an advice column "Dear Ms. Vicki" that appears in the Washington Times, the Fort Campbell Courier and the Heidelberg Herald Post. Ms. Vicki also hosts an internet radio show and blogs on her community site with the Washington Times. If you want to ask Ms. Vicki for advice about your military life, please email her at AskMsVicki@military-inc.com.

Vets respond to court overturning Stolen Valor

By Allen Reed - The Associated Press

Posted : Sunday Jul 1, 2012 14:47:31 EDT

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. — Jack Jacobs can proudly — and truthfully — say he was awarded the Medal of Honor for his valor in Vietnam. After a recent Supreme Court ruling, anyone else is free under the First Amendment to make the same claim, whether it's true or not.

Some military veterans say they consider the ruling a slap in the face. For Jacobs, though, it was the right decision. He said he wore the uniform to protect people's rights — even if he doesn't agree with how they exercise those rights.

Related reading

[Court rejects Stolen Valor, suggests rewrite](#) (June 28)

"There are lots of things people do that revolt me, but I'm happy that I fought for this country not to give them the right to do something stupid, but for the majority of the people to do the right thing," said Jacobs, 66, who earned the Medal of Honor in 1969 for carrying several of his buddies to safety from a shelled rice field despite the shrapnel wounds in his head, the streaming blood clouding his vision.

"I'm a free speech guy," he said.

The high court ruled 6-3 on Thursday to toss out the conviction of Xavier Alvarez, a former California politician who lied about being a decorated military veteran. He had been charged under the 2006 Stolen Valor Act, which made it a crime to lie about receiving the Medal of Honor and other prestigious military recognitions. The decision invalidated the law, as the justices ruled Alvarez's fabricated story was constitutionally protected speech.

For 87-year-old Murel Winans, lies about service can cause real harm and lead people to doubt the veracity of claims made by people who actually served during wartime. He said he didn't buy the free speech argument.

"You feel like you never earned it, because when you tell someone what you've done, they'll say, 'you're lying just like those other guys,'" said Winans, 87, who described himself as a "fresh young hillbilly from West Virginia" when he landed on Normandy's Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944 — his 19th birthday.

The law was inspired by the 1998 book “Stolen Valor” by B.G. “Jug” Burkett, a Vietnam veteran. The government had argued the law was a needed tool to protect the integrity of military medals.

The ruling was issued the same day as the high court’s landmark decision upholding President Obama’s signature health care overhaul. While much of the nation watched with rapt focus on what would become of the law that requires every American to have health insurance, many people in military communities were more focused on the ruling on the Stolen Valor Act.

Emotions ran high in Fayetteville, home to the 251-square-mile Fort Bragg. About 38 percent of North Carolina’s population is either currently in the service, a veteran or a dependent of one, according to the N.C. Department of Administration. The state is also home to the sprawling Camp Lejeune, known for its training in amphibious assaults like the one at Normandy.

“My boys are out there giving their heart and soul,” said Rose Moore, whose son is stationed in Afghanistan. “To have someone say they did it and they didn’t do anything — it’s a lie, it’s dishonest.”

Army Capt. Albert Bryant acknowledged that he was disappointed, saying the lies can detract from people who earn something like the Medal of Honor. However, his disappointment was somewhat tempered.

“I know it’s the First Amendment, but maybe you need to have an amendment to the amendment to protect our enlisted men and women,” Bryant said. “Very few things in life are black and white so you have to take certain things in context, but there has to be some kind of common sense applied.”

The decision doesn’t give anyone carte blanche to lie about their service record in an effort to get free perks, however. Anyone who fabricates any honors can still face fraud charges, which is what happened to former Marine Sgt. David Budwah in 2009. He was demoted to private and dishonorably discharged after pretending to be a wounded war hero to get free seats at rock concerts and sports events.

Twenty-year Army veteran Raymond Hunt said the justices made the right move in protecting free speech. He said it’s enough that Alvarez has been publicly shamed.

“For the rest of his life he has to walk around with that look on his face and know that he was the biggest liar in the country on something that is so sensitive to our country,” Hunt said.

Retired Army Lt. Hal Fritz said the court treated those medals as something abstract. But for him, it’s a memory. Fritz was leading a seven-vehicle armored column down a Vietnam highway in 1969 when enemy combatants launched a surprise attack from all sides. Fritz was seriously wounded in the crossfire, but ran through the machine gun blasts to rally his troops. After his platoon survived the first wave, Fritz charged into a second enemy advancement armed with only a pistol and a bayonet. He was seriously wounded, but refused medical attention until all of his men had been cared for. He was awarded the Medal of Honor in 1971.

“We would disagree with the majority saying lying about receiving the medals doesn’t devalue them,” said Fritz, 68, who now lives in Illinois. “I would say go back with me to Vietnam dragging the dead and dying off the battlefield.”

The Medal of Honor is among the rarest of honors: Only 81 of the 3,457 recipients since the Civil War are still living. Of those, only three are younger than 35, according to the Congressional Medal of Honor Society.

Of those interviewed, the Medal of Honor recipients agreed that Congress should try again to pass a similar law that would survive judicial scrutiny. That didn’t ease the anger of people like Vietnam veteran Richard A. Pittman, who was awarded the Medal of Honor in 1968.

He had left his platoon to help Marines under fire, exhausting several machine guns before hurling his final weapon at the enemy: a grenade. His actions halted the Vietnamese advancement and bought time that saved many of his wounded companions.

“I’m supportive of the Constitution, but in this case I just think they’re wrong,” said Pittman, 68, who now lives in California. “I wonder what the Supreme Court would think if part of my resume said I was a member of the Supreme Court or I answered my phone ‘Justice Pittman.’”

Soldier's World War II dog tag found near Rome

By Jim Carney - Akron Beacon Journal via the AP Posted : Sunday Jul 1, 2012 16:47:04 EDT

CUYAHOGA FALLS, Ohio — Two Italian gardeners were working in their backyard this spring when something caught their eye.

The shiny item coming up through dirt near Rome turned out to be the dog tag for an American soldier from World War II. It belonged to Army Sgt. Mike Baranek, an Akron South High School graduate who died at age 64 in 1980, when he was living in Cuyahoga Falls.

Baranek, an Ohio Edison retiree, took part in several battles in Europe with the 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment. He fought in Italy and was wounded twice.

The dog tag is back in Cuyahoga Falls with his widow, Nellie Baranek, 95, sent to her by the Italian gardeners Olga Romagnolo and her friend, known only as Simone.

Its next journey will take it to another battlefield of sorts.

The dog tag will be sent to Canada, where the veteran's granddaughter, Tammy Mahoney, 41, will clasp it as she receives chemotherapy and radiation treatment for breast cancer in Niagara Falls, Ontario.

"I was very close to him," said Mahoney, a Stow-Munroe Falls High School graduate and mother of three children. "By having this near me, hopefully it will get me through this."

The Baranek family learned the dog tag had been found a few days before Mahoney officially was diagnosed with cancer, she said.

Barbara Lane of Munroe Falls, Baranek's daughter, said her own daughter believes that finding the dog tag is a divine sign.

"Here I am. I am watching over you," is Mahoney's interpretation of the discovery of the dog tag, Lane said.

Baranek's son, also named Mike and himself an Army veteran, said his father rarely spoke of his military experiences. Records show his father received a Purple Heart, Distinguished Service Cross, Bronze Stars and other medals for his service from about 1942 to 1944 with the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion.

Posted on the website of the 509th Parachute Infantry Association, www.509thgeronimo.org, is an example of Baranek's heroism.

"Sgt. Baranek, a communications sergeant, volunteered to accompany an officer and another enlisted man in the perilous task of clearing enemy land mines and booby traps from the route of advance," the description reads.

Coming upon heavy machine-gun fire on Mount Croce, they assaulted an enemy crew, then made a second attack. After the officer had "become a casualty," the report said, Baranek and the other enlisted man captured and killed a gun crew and riflemen.

"Baranek's coolness and disregard for enemy fire prevented many casualties among the members of the company and his heroic performance exemplifies the finest traditions of the armed forces," the entry continues.

The Italian gardeners, who live in a suburb of Rome, searched the Internet for clues about Baranek, whose dog tag listed his home address and hometown as Akron. Eventually they connected with Matt Anderson, the historian for the 509th.

Anderson said Baranek came ashore at Anzio on Jan. 22, 1944, and by Jan. 31, was about 12 miles inland at Carano, Italy. He said he believes Baranek might have lost his dog tag during June or July 1944, after the liberation of Rome, when the 509th had a liberal pass policy and troops often explored Rome.

"Your father was here and we are honored to give you back a little piece of him and a big piece of memory at the same time," Romagnolo wrote by email to Baranek's son.

"Finding your father's dog tag during a common gardening session has been something special," she said, calling the discovery and its return to Ohio a "romantic message of love."

This summer, Jim Leone, 64, of Stow, owner of Akron Monument and Granite, hopes to visit his parents' native Italy with his mother, Anna "Nina" Leone, 90, of Cuyahoga Falls, and other relatives. Roland Leone, who died in 2009 at the age of 94, served in the same company as Baranek and the two were friends.

Jim Leone plans to visit Olga and Simone to thank them for finding the dog tag and sending it to the Baranek family. Tammy Mahoney said that over the next several months, she will hold the dog tag in her hand during cancer treatments.

"It's a story you would see in a movie," she said of receiving the memento at this critical time in her life.

LATEST NEWS

Are you or do you know an unemployed Veteran age 35-60? The Department of Veteran Affairs has a new program to provide up to 12 months of training and education assistance to obtain meaningful employment in a high-demand occupation. The **Veterans Retraining Assistance Program** will offer assistance to 99,000 eligible participants. Applications are rolling in, so don't delay! Visit www.benefits.va.gov/vow/ to get more information.

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VA: 1,300 vets get job offers at Detroit event

By [Rick Maze](#) - Staff writer Posted : Tuesday Jul 3, 2012 16:04:49 EDT

A Detroit jobs fair resulted in 1,300 veterans receiving job offers and more than 5,500 getting job interviews, the Veterans Affairs Department reported — the kind of success the department is looking for as it considers holding similar events in other cities.

Upcoming VA job fairs

Colorado Springs: July 12 Minneapolis: Aug. 2 Houston: Aug. 9

San Diego: Sept. 6 San Antonio: Sept. 13 Cincinnati: Sept. 20 Chicago: Sept. 27

Tampa: Oct. 4

The three-day event, which ended June 28, was a partnership involving VA, the Chamber of Commerce and first lady Michelle Obama's Joining Forces initiative. It brought 260 private-sector companies and government agencies together in one place to try to help veterans land jobs.

In a statement, VA Secretary Eric Shinseki said veterans were helped in "many different ways."

"Many received job offers, others received access to the health care and benefits they have earned, while others received information that will help them build their business," he said.

Similar events are planned in more cities, VA officials said.

In addition to job interviews, VA provided health care screenings, with 3,500 veterans referred for care and 140 veterans receiving medical or dental exams. Additionally, 2,100 veterans signed up for online notifications about benefits and programs.

Vietnam at 50: Any lessons for Afghanistan?

By Rick Hampson and Carmen Gentile - USA Today Posted : Tuesday Jul 3, 2012 14:23:29 EDT

By April 29, 1975, America's war in Vietnam had been over for two years. But as he stood post at the gate of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, a city encircled by 16 communist divisions, Sgt. Bill Newell got the news: Two fellow Marine security guards had been killed at the airport.

Charlie McMahon and Darwin Judge were new in country; McMahon had arrived 11 days earlier. They'd never fired their weapons in combat. They'd been assigned to the airport in part because it was safer and would be evacuated sooner.

Instead, because of an enemy rocket, they'd be the last Americans to die in the Vietnam War.

On this Independence Day, the nation is beginning to observe what the government has designated as the conflict's 50th anniversary, and to wind down the war that replaced Vietnam as America's longest. The confluence invites a consideration of patriotism and what it means to fall late in war, or last.

The morning after Judge and McMahon died, Bill Newell was on the second-to-last helicopter to leave the embassy roof. He later stood on the deck of the Essex-class aircraft carrier Hancock and watched as craft that had evacuated him and thousands of others were pushed from the crowded carrier into the South China Sea.

Today, living outside Boston and running an investment portfolio management firm, he witnesses from afar the long, slow end of another war. Driving home at night, radio on, he listens to the moment of silence and the reading of the names of the dead in Afghanistan.

He thinks of Judge, 19-year-old son of an Iowa mailman, and McMahon, the 1971 Woburn, Mass., Boys Club "Boy of the Year." He thinks of their successors, the latest warriors to fight and die in war's twilight, when the outcome has been decided and the original objective won, lost or forgotten.

Newell is struck by the similarities between his war and this one. Again, America fights an unpopular, limited war in Asia while negotiating with its insurgent adversaries.

Ken Locke sees it, too. He was Darwin Judge's friend in Marshalltown, Iowa. He learned of his death on TV at the grocery store where he worked after school. He walked to the back, sat on some boxes and cried. He was as much shocked as grieved: "In our minds, Vietnam was over."

Afghanistan is far from over, but it's winding down — a 33,000-troop reduction planned by the end of the year, and most of the remaining 68,000 out in 2014.

"It will be bittersweet when we bring them home, because there's going to be that last guy — or gal," Locke says. "What do you say to the last person killed in Afghanistan?"

A similar question was posed 41 years ago by John Kerry, then a young antiwar Vietnam veteran, when he testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: "How do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?"

Although most agree Vietnam was a mistake (although not why), the Afghanistan war's many defenders include Kerry, chairman of the committee before which he once testified. Writing last month in the Chicago Tribune, he said "a premature departure would jeopardize the chances for a responsible transition" and warned of "a precipitous departure driven by antipathy to the current war dynamic."

If Kerry is not voicing the question that helped make him famous, another veteran from that era is.

James Reston Jr. is a writer at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington. He enlisted in the Army after college in 1965 because, he says, of President Johnson's call to serve in the national defense. He came to oppose that war, and today he's a critic of the one in Afghanistan.

"People say, 'I'd be happy to be the last person to die in World War II.' But most of my life has been dominated by questionable, morally ambiguous wars. Kerry's question is very relevant today. How do you ask the last soldier to die for a slow drawdown?"

The last to fall

Death late in war is especially poignant. The last death is almost unbearable, if often hard to identify. The American experience:

- World War I: Pvt. Henry Gunther, 23, was killed one minute before the armistice took effect at 11 a.m. on Nov. 11, 1918. As his unit approached a German roadblock, Gunther — against orders — charged with his bayonet. The German soldiers tried to wave him off but shot him after he kept coming.

Later, other soldiers told a reporter for Gunther's hometown paper, The Sun in Baltimore, that he felt disgraced when he was busted from sergeant earlier in the war and wanted to redeem himself.

- World War II: When U.S. troops on the island of Okinawa learned of the Japanese surrender Aug. 15, 1945, they fired their weapons in the air to celebrate. Seven were killed by raining bullets, and scores were wounded. They arguably were not the war's last fatalities. Some Japanese soldiers continued to resist for months or years. Pfc. William Bates, who'd survived the battle of Iwo Jima, was shot and killed on Guam on Dec. 14, 1945, by a Japanese holdout.

- Korean War: The war lasted from 1950 until 1953, but some of the bloodiest battles occurred after it was stalemated in 1951 and peace talks began. In the spring and summer of 1953, more than 300 Americans were killed and more than 1,000 wounded in a fight over what became known as Pork Chop Hill. In a battle two weeks before the cease-fire, four of 13 U.S. company commanders were killed.

On the war's last day, July 27, at least 31 Americans died. Hal Barker, founder of the Korean War Project casualty database, says it's impossible to know who was the last, because fighting went on up to the last minute.

- Vietnam War: Judge and McMahon are generally considered the last to die. Lt. Col. William Nolde, a military professor at Central Michigan University who'd volunteered for Vietnam, was killed by artillery fire on Jan. 27, 1973, 11 hours before the United States signed the Paris Peace Accords. He's considered the last U.S. fatality in the war's combat phase.

But the killing didn't end even after the fall of Saigon. Two weeks later, Cambodian communist forces seized the U.S. merchant ship Mayaguez. The United States launched a military rescue operation on an island where the crew was thought to have been held. When the force withdrew, two Marines — Gary Hall and Danny Marshall — were accidentally left behind, and later killed.

- Iraq War: On Nov. 14, 2011, Army Spc. [David Hickman](#) of McLeansville, N.C., was killed when the armored vehicle in which he rode was hit by a roadside bomb. Although combat operations had ended months before Hickman arrived in Iraq, he's listed as the 4,483rd and last U.S. service member to die there.

Tommy Pursley was Hickman's high school football coach. He said the death was so shocking because of its timing: "At that point, you think, it's over, everyone's safe."

Pursley, 59, was of draft age during Vietnam. To get a deferment, he went to Appalachian State University on ROTC. The program's members were so stigmatized on campus that the day the draft was abolished, he says, he turned in his uniform. "History has shown what a mistake that war was," Pursley says. "You wonder what history will show about this war."

He worries about two of his former players serving in Afghanistan. "It's not like it's some high and noble cause like World War II," he says. "But for David, it was. He did the honorable thing. You got to admire him for that."

'I'm doing this job'

Bill Newell's personal connection to the war in Afghanistan is not a relative or neighbor, but one of the Marines in that helicopter with him 37 springs ago in Saigon.

At 59, Staff Sgt. Don Nicholas spent most of last year with an Army Reserve psychological operations unit in Kunar province. It was his second tour of duty in Afghanistan, where he probably was the oldest frontline U.S. soldier. Nicholas left the Marine Corps in 1978 and joined the Army Reserve in 2004. He hopes to return to Afghanistan, even though at his age that seems unlikely.

Having seen the end of another war, he has some idea what to expect in this one. He says he doesn't care whether the war is ramping up or winding down: "It's irrelevant to me. I've signed on the line. I'm doing this job, and if I have to stay to the last day and get killed, well, only God can make that decision."

A similarly stoic note is struck by soldiers in the 4th Infantry Division at an outpost in Nuristan province in northeastern Afghanistan, near the volatile Pakistan border.

Although many of the original U.S. war goals — vanquishing the Taliban, installing democracy, abolishing corruption — have largely been abandoned, the men told USA Today they were focused on the mission, not how soon it will end.

"It's time to move on — once the mission is done," says Staff Sgt. Joseph Perminas, 34, who is on his second tour. "It's not my job to say when the mission is done, but the mission will be done once we're told."

Sgt. 1st Class Robert Anderson, 36, is on his fourth deployment in Afghanistan. He says "it's about time" the war is winding down: "We've been here so long." How does he feel about risking his life at this point in the war? "We are still here to support and train these guys," he says, referring to Afghan troops. "If that puts myself or my soldiers in harm's way, I guess we have to do it."

Not everyone agrees. Alejandro Villatoro, 29, served in eastern Afghanistan last year with an Indiana-based Army Reserve transport unit. In driving a truck in the war zone, he says, "I was risking my life for nothing. We were supposed to be winning hearts and minds, but I didn't see much sign of that."

Villatoro, a member of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Against the War, says the U.S. cause was doomed by events such as [the inadvertent burning of copies of the Koran](#) by troops at Bagram Air Base; the [alleged murder of 17 Afghan civilians](#) by an Army sergeant; and a video of Marines urinating on dead Taliban fighters.

All the warriors agree on this: No matter how the war turns out, or when it ends, they'll have served their country with honor.

Retired Army Brig. Gen. Casey Brower teaches at The Citadel. Forty years ago, he commanded an armored unit that was the last to leave Vietnam. By that time, April 1972, his company had lost five men. A few months later, U.S. combat operations ceased. Troops, he says, don't get to choose their war; honor accrues not to the battle fought, but the service rendered. "It's a question of giving back to your nation," Brower says. "That's where patriotism comes in."

Patriotism, in this formulation, includes a willingness to be the last to die — in victory at Iwo Jima or in futility at Pork Chop Hill, against those who fought for Marx or fight for Mohammed.

Who knows if and when it comes to that? "You don't see the end," says Staff Sgt. Brandon Tulloch, 30, who has served two tours in Iraq and is on his second in Afghanistan. "It just shows up."

Rick Hampson reported from New York; Carmen Gentile reported from Combat Outpost Kalagush, Afghanistan

Experts warn of leaving Afghanistan too soon

By Kevin Wang - Medill News Service Posted : Tuesday Jul 3, 2012 17:02:02 EDT

As the U.S. and its NATO allies gradually reduce their commitments in Afghanistan, foreign policy experts cautioned Tuesday there's still a long way to go before handing the leadership back to the Afghans.

"We are in the midst of a political, economic and security transition that will likely define the future of the country and region for decades for come," said Alex Thier, assistant to the administrator and director of the Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs, a division of the U.S. Agency for International Development.

At a Brookings Institution discussion, Thier, along with two other experts in U.S. foreign policy, credited that transition as a significant success so far in the country that has been America's "intense focus" during the past decade. But they said they also saw severe risks that could undermine the efforts the U.S. has devoted to the region.

Ronald Neumann, U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan from 2005-07, said the presumption that American troops could walk away from the country worry-free after 2014 is "threatening" and "unrealistic," since the training period for local Afghan government forces was too short.

"You have to leave people in place for at least two to three years," said Neumann, who visited Afghanistan in May. "We are not winding down the war on terrorism. We are only winding down our part in it."

Neumann warned that the U.S. will "pay a very serious price" if the administration did not consider Afghanistan's security and economic conditions carefully.

Besides actively fighting insurgents, NATO forces have other duties in Afghanistan in the coming years, such as strengthening the country's economy, and establishing transparency and accountability within the local government, the panelists said.

Although NATO has helped the Afghans to develop "more rapidly than any previous decade" historically, Thier said, the effort is not an unqualified success.

"The progress remains fragile due to ongoing insurgency, lack of political settlements, corruption and still-weak society," Thier said. "We need to ask what is normal for the people of Afghanistan, and how do they see their own future?"

Andy Griffith:

Most folks will remember Andy Griffith for his role as Sheriff Andy Taylor and the [small-town American values](#) he captured on *The Andy Griffith Show*. A few others will mention the crafty Atlanta defense lawyer he played on *Matlock*.

We'd like to remember Andy for an amazing movie career, including a couple of iconic roles in World War II comedies.

Most famous is *No Time For Sergeants*, the WWII comedy where Griffith plays a country bumpkin drafted in the U.S. Army and later assigned to the Air Force. Based on a best-selling novel by Mac Hyman, Griffith got his big break in the Broadway play and later reprised the role of the seemingly unsophisticated Will Stockdale in the wildly successful movie version. It turns out Will has a lot more sense than the officers around him.

The movie's also notable for its Manual Dexterity test, a scene that introduces the comic chemistry between Griffith and Don Knotts that would later flourish in their roles as Andy Taylor and Barney Fife on *The Andy Griffith Show*.

In this clip, Griffith talks about his role in developing the play and the movie. Over the course of his career, he proved be a shrewd businessman, keeping ownership of his tv series (and its spinoffs *Gomer Pyle*, *U.S.M.C.* and *Mayberry RFD*).

Less well known and almost as funny is *Onionhead*, a 1958 movie where Griffith plays a college student who hopes to sit out WWII by joining the Coast Guard. Made quickly to cash in on his *No Time for Sergeants* success, it received mixed reviews at the time but the movie's a lot better than it got credit for when it came out.

It features a great performance by Walter Matthau, Joey Bishop, James Gregory (from *The Manchurian Candidate* and Ursus in *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*) and Claude Akins (Sheriff Lobo and Aldo in *Battle for Planet of the Apes*).

Matthau had famously played opposite Griffith and Patricia Neal in 1957's *A Face in the Crowd*, one of the great Hollywood movies ever. Featuring Griffith as Lonesome Rhodes, a scheming drifter who becomes a media sensation, the character couldn't be further from the actor's image as kindly Sheriff Taylor.

Another great role that goes against the Sheriff Taylor image is the aging movie cowboy Pike in 1975's *Hearts of the West*. Griffith teaches Jeff Bridges some hard lessons about the movie business.

Both *Onionhead* and *Hearts of the West* are tough to catch on TV, but Turner Classic Movies just announced that they're showing all four movies we talked about in this post on [Wednesday night July 18th](#). Check 'em out.

Tags: [Andy Griffith](#) [TCM](#) [WWII](#)

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Under the Radar

VA promises results on claims process fixes

By [Rick Maze](#) - Staff writer

Posted : Wednesday Jul 11, 2012 13:00:47 EDT

Veterans Affairs Department officials pledged Wednesday that its backlog of benefits claims will begin to shrink, with hopes for a modest 5 percent improvement by the end of the year and a more significant drop in 2013 as changes in claims handling and employee training take root.

Progress might have come sooner if not for the fact that disability benefits claims are becoming more complicated all the time.

Allison Hickey, the retired Air Force brigadier general who serves as VA's undersecretary for benefits, said the average claim now includes 15 separate disabilities for which a veteran is seeking compensation, a change from days when veterans had one or two disabilities.

Hickey said the backlog includes 911,000 pending claims, 597,000 of which are more than 125 days old.

By year's end, Hickey said VA expects the backlog to be cut to 60 percent of the pending inventory. By the end of 2014, the backlog should be cut to 40 percent, she said. VA's goal, which Hickey did not repeat during a conference call with reporters, is to completely eliminate the backlog in 2015.

Related reading

[VA touts new training for claims workers](#) (July 10)

VA officials have made similar promises before, only to encounter problems. For example, VA predicted in 2011 that it would turn the corner in 2012 by processing more claims that it receives. That has not happened, in part because the flood of new claims is growing and because VA has yet to show significant progress in a number of reforms aimed at improving speed and accuracy.

Hickey, though, said improvements are coming as a result of three initiatives.

First, VA has finished processing more than 200,000 Agent Orange-related claims from Vietnam-era veterans that had temporarily clogged the claims system as a result of a retroactive expansion of benefits. The 2,300 people who had been working on those claims and other retroactive issues wrapped up their work at the end of June, and are being reassigned to help dig out from under the mountain of other claims, Hickey said.

Second, VA will expand to 16 regional offices after a pilot project showed claims can be processed more quickly and accurately if the easier ones are separated from the complex ones.

Under a so-called "express lane" process, about 20 percent of claims that involve only one or two disabilities, or were prepared for VA review by a veterans service organization claims expert, will be handled in one lane. Hickey said processing times for claims prepared with the aid of a VSO average 117 days faster than others, and she encouraged veterans with complicated claims to see help from organizations that provide such assistance.

A second lane will handle the roughly 20 percent of claims that VA believes need special handling. These include claims involving financial hardship; homelessness; serious wounds, injuries or illnesses; post-traumatic stress disorder associated with military sexual trauma; and former prisoners of war. Severely disabled Iraq and Afghanistan veterans already have had their cases handled by a special team, with disability compensation approved, on average, in 54 days with another four or five days before receiving their first check, she said.

The rest of the claims will go through the regular process, but will see the benefits of a third improvement, in the training arena. A [new, more comprehensive method of training new claims workers](#), involving about half the traditional training time, has resulted in faster, more accurate claims, Hickey said.

A new employee who goes through the three-month "challenge" training is able to process, on average, at least one claim a day with 95 percent accuracy. Those training under the old, six-month training program completed an average of one claim every two days with 60 percent accuracy.

Hickey began the conference call, however, on the defensive about the impact of the claims backlog on veterans. She said the backlog is not the almost 1 million pending claims, but only those that have been sitting longer than the 125-day goal set by the VA. "Inventory is different than a backlog," she said.

Additionally, she said most veterans whose claims are pending before VA already are receiving disability compensation but are applying to have their disability ratings increased, qualifying them for more money. Sixty-one percent of the pending claims are "looking for re-rating," she said.

About half of those already receiving benefits have current disability ratings of 50 percent or more, making them eligible for full medical benefits without co-payments, she said.

The progress cited by Hickey did not sway the House Veterans' Affairs Committee chairman, who has been a fierce and increasingly vocal critic of the claims process.

"Today VA is touting a training program and faster claims processing through structural changes as though they have finally found the key," Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., said in a statement. "Is this something we should cheer? People doing jobs they get paid to do?"

Miller said he wants to see "a long-term plan, not these continuous announcements by VA to give the appearance that the veterans will get their claims decided faster."

Witnesses: General Opposed Hospital Abuse Probe

Jul 24, 2012 Associated Press| by Larry Margasak

WASHINGTON -- The American general who led NATO's training mission in Afghanistan opposed an inspector general's investigation into "Auschwitz-like conditions" and corruption at the main Afghan army military hospital, two retired U.S. military officers are telling Congress.

The retired officers, in testimony prepared for a House hearing Tuesday, said Lt. Gen. William Caldwell IV admonished subordinates for contacting the Defense Department's inspector general about Dawood National Military Hospital.

Caldwell is now head of the Army North command and senior commander of Fort Sam Houston in Texas.

North Command spokesman Col. Wayne Shanks said, "I am sure that Lt. Gen. Caldwell would welcome the opportunity to respond to any inquiry and I'm confident that once the facts are presented and examined, all allegations will be proven false."

The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee said Caldwell could be called to testify in a future hearing.

Retired Army Col. Gerald Carozza Jr., who was chief of legal development assisting the Afghan Army and defense ministry, said Caldwell at one point expressed concern that the request was too close to the 2010 congressional elections. But Carozza added that in his view, Caldwell "did not want the request to go to the DOD IG (Department of Defense inspector general) at all."

"The general did not want bad news to leave his command before the election or after the election," Carozza will testify. The Associated Press obtained a copy of the testimony in advance of the hearing.

In September 2011, The Wall Street Journal reported from Kabul that U.S. officers found that patients at the hospital were routinely dying of simple infections and starving to death, while corrupt doctors and nurses demanded bribes for food and basic care.

A memorandum written by another committee witness, retired Air Force Col. Schuyler Geller, confirmed the poor treatment and corruption. Geller, a command surgeon attached to the training mission, agreed in a memo that Caldwell did not want an inspector general's investigation.

Eventually, Caldwell agreed to ask for a limited investigation, but Carozza said his request for the inquiry "would not mention the Auschwitz-like conditions at the National Military Hospital."

It appears the inspector general went further than a limited investigation. Committee officials said the inspector general has now opened two investigations in response to complaints into the conduct of Caldwell and a deputy, now-Maj. Gen. Gary Patton.

One investigation is focused on the Military Whistleblower Protection Act, which prohibits commanders from restricting subordinates' communication with the inspector general. The second complaint involves allegations of reprisal from a complainant who alleged that Caldwell and Patton cited partisan reasons for requesting postponement of an investigation until after the 2010 elections.

Carozza said the committee should be considering a broader issue than conditions at the hospital.

"What this hearing should about are attempts to over-control the message," he will tell the panel. "It is about some leadership that puts the best foot forward and relies on the hard built reputation earned by the military to soften any belief that there is a need to see the other foot."

Carozza said he spoke to three officers who were called to a meeting with Caldwell, and all of them offered the same description of the general's comments.

"Lt. Gen. Caldwell screamed at these three officers, waving his finger at them for trying to bring in the DOD IG," Carozza said. The general was quoted as saying, "There is nothing wrong in this command that we can't fix ourselves."

Carozza said he was in a meeting with Caldwell's deputy, Patton, when Patton "informed the group that Lt. Gen. Caldwell was upset about making the request to DOD IG so close to the election and we were to consider postponing it until afterwards."

"It was a stunning moment for me," Carozza said.

The retired Air Force surgeon, Geller, wrote in a memo that he was at a briefing presented to Caldwell about the need for an investigation.

"LTG Caldwell continued to press for why any external review should be called," Geller said. "It became clear he did not support the investigation."

Geller said Caldwell raised his voice and told one participant, "You should have known better." He said Caldwell then made the same statement to Geller and another participant.

The surgeon added he was not allowed to speak to the media about his memo.

Doctor, 64, Joins Army for Afghan Duty

Jul 03, 2012 Buffalo News| by Lou Michel

At a time in life when most people are looking forward to retirement, Lawrence B. Bone is heading off to war. The 64-year-old orthopedic surgeon has joined the Army Reserve and leaves for Afghanistan in July. The reason he joined the military so late in life is to help wounded service members, and he knows personally why his skills are needed.

His son, Christian B. Bone, now 33, suffered a severe combat wound in Iraq in 2006. When his son returned home, the father- surgeon witnessed firsthand the price he paid.

"He was injured in a Humvee when an improvised explosive device went off," said Larry Bone, chairman of the orthopedic department at the University at Buffalo School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. "When he returned to the States, I oversaw the physical therapy on his right shoulder."

Bone later learned that 75 percent of war wounds require the skilled hands of an orthopedist, and he soon realized he could not sit back and look toward the comfort and security of retirement, without first making a stand himself.

In 2009, Bone was at a military reception during a national orthopedic trauma meeting in Salt Lake City.

"We could use your services," he was told.

"I'm too old," Bone responded.

"We have an age waiver for areas of critical need," came the reply.

Orthopedic surgeons were among the most in demand for war duty.

The Orchard Park resident said that he returned home from the conference and that after discussing his intentions with "a very supportive family," he drove to the Army Reserve medical office in Amherst.

"I said 'I want to volunteer.' Normally, 56 years old is the cutoff age for enlisting as a surgeon," Bone said. But he persisted, and 20 months later, he was commissioned as a lieutenant colonel in the Army Reserve.

A member of the 865th Combat Support Hospital at Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, he is due to arrive in the war zone July 27 and can hardly wait to save lives.

"I'm very, very excited to go and get over there. Our young men and women are still being injured, and after 30 years of treating civilian trauma victims, I'm honored to have this opportunity to treat our military," he said.

Officials at the Niagara Falls base say they are thrilled to have him on board.

"We sent him to fill a critical shortage with our deploying 624th Forward Surgical Team at the Army Trauma Training Center in Miami last February, and he was well received by the unit and ATTC staff," Lt. Col. Dawn T. Flynn said at the Niagara Falls base. "He was able to share his experience with them."

Although he is older, Bone says, he anticipates he will be able to handle the rigors of serving in a war zone because he is in excellent physical condition. At 5-feet-7 and 155 pounds, he says, he feels more like 40 than 64.

"I've completed personal physical training and two courses in military trauma training," Bone said of his preparation.

Flynn added that Bone is not bragging when he says he is in top- notch physical condition.

"Our maximum score for the physical fitness test is 300, and Larry consistently scores between 340 and 360," Flynn said.

The journey to war, Bone added, has made him all the more aware of what others in the medical profession have been doing for years, taking time off from their civilian careers and defending the country by caring for those harmed on the front lines.

"Most recently, the 1982nd Forward Surgical Team at Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station was deployed for nine months and was the busiest forward surgical team in Afghanistan during that time," Bone said.

By serving, he says, he will also have the chance to return the favor of caring for the wounded just as his son was cared for by a military orthopedic surgeon in Baghdad during the Iraq War.

"It's a chance for me to help someone else's son," he said.

After Christian Bone recovered from his war wounds, he left the military and studied to become a registered nurse. He now works at Buffalo Veterans Affairs Medical Center, attending to wounded veterans, something that makes his father and mother, Paula, a retired teacher, very proud.

As for the doctor's family, Bone said, "My son and wife are extremely supportive, though my two daughters sometimes wonder why, but understand their father."

Part of the reason Bone agreed to tell his story of this late-in- life career move, he said, was to draw attention to the Niagara Falls base, whose future remains in question as the Pentagon considers what bases to close for cost-saving purposes. The local base, Bone said, provides a critical link between the armed forces and citizen soldiers.

Bone is one of the oldest reservists to come out of the base. He'll turn 65 in October, during his deployment to Afghanistan, and said he has no plans of taking a break to file for Social Security retirement benefits. He says he is not even considering retirement from the Army Reserve or his position at UB.

In fact, he said, "I'm already looking forward to future deployments to Afghanistan."



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